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Standing Committee on
State Boards of Public...

Ideal public charity

Des Moines

1895

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IDEAL PUBLIC CHARITY.

REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

—ON—

STATE BOARDS OF PUBLIC CHARITIES,

TO THE

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHARITIES.

—AT—

NEW HAVEN.

PRESENTED

SATURDAY, MAY 25, 1895.

DES MOINES:
IOWA STATE REGISTER PRINT.
1895.

THE IDEAL OF PUBLIC CHARITY.

The world is governed by ideas: the idealist is an uncrowned king. All institutions are the embodiment of ideas. The ideal of mutual affection and self-sacrifice is forever renewed in the family, which keeps it alive, for the benefit of mankind, as the Roman vestals preserved for posterity the divine gift of fire. The church exists as a semi-supernatural propaganda of righteousness—a righteousness so transcendent that it ceases to be known by that name, and is called holiness, instead. The modern state has its invisible, if not unattainable goal, in the reconciliation of personal freedom with the acknowledged need for order and subordination. The ideal of the university is scholarship: the revelation of the unknown, not by miracle, but as the reward of intellectual labor, and by the conservation and diffusion of the discoveries of philosophy, science, and art. These and all other ideals are in the nature of inspiration, moving individuals and the world to higher and yet higher achievements. The crises of history have been the epochs when the passionate purpose to realize some unfulfilled ideal has swept into temporary oblivion the prudential considerations which impede the path of progress. The leaders of humanity have been the men with the largest, clearest, highest, most enduring ideals; whom the world has at first scorned, as it scoffed at Lincoln and crucified Jesus Christ, but whose conceptions of life and duty have at last been accepted and given shape to customs and to laws. The idealist is a poet of the first rank; he does not write poetry, perhaps, but he lives it, in the sense that his imagination enables him to see what other men can not see, because it is hidden or too remote; and by translating his vision into action he takes rank with the creators. His power depends upon his sensibility, for an idea may be defined as a thought wedded to a sentiment.

It is the idea that underlies this Conference, which gives it vitality and influence. The same idea underlies the State Boards of Public Charities. To develop it in your consciousness is the aim of the present report. For there are three mental states: consciousness, unconsciousness, and sub-consciousness. Sub-consciousness resembles latent heat. It is the condition of pretty much all bodies of men, in proportion to their size. A community is never blind to its history, relations, and destiny; yet it perhaps never fully images them forth to itself.

In its original constitution, this Conference is essentially the annual meeting with each other of the American State Boards of Charities, which the representatives of all charitable and correctional institutions and societies in the United States are invited to attend. The motive of the invitation so freely extended is twofold: It includes the desire on the part o' the members and officers of these boards to qualify themselves for their work by a wider survey of the field which it is their special duty to cultivate; and also the wish to create a wise public opinion upon all questions connected with the care of the destitute, the unfortunate, and the criminal, as the only medium in which these boards can act so as rightly to discharge their peculiar function of influencing legislation. The aim of the State Boards and of the Conference, in this regard, is identical. More with a view to emphasizing the permanent relations of the Boards to the Conference, than for any other reason, its president has always, until this year, been chosen from their own number. To keep the Conference alive and to extend its power for good is one of their first and highest obligations, as it is their obvious interest. No other power can do it. If the general direction and control of the work of the Conference should ever be wrested from them, at the suggestion of personal ambition or excessive enthusiasm for the promotion of some special philanthropic interest, by the will of an accidental numerical majority, the organization would, in our judgment, be in peril of going to

pieces; and the section which should retain the name, but not the substance which the name implies, would become a fragmentary body devoid of any large attractive power, like a star without a solar orbit.

The first element in the composite ideal for which the State Boards and the Conference stand is universality. This universality grows out of the solidarity of the states of which the Boards are organs, and out of the breadth of the responsibilities imposed upon them by the laws to which they owe their existence.

They depend upon no section of the community for support and authority. They sustain no official relation of affiliation to any religious sect. They are, or should be, above the limitations of partisan fealty. They are under no obligation, and they have no right to reflect, in their sympathies or efforts, the narrow views of any set of social or philanthropic *doctrinaires*. Their place in the economy of charitable and correctional administration is unmistakably defined, and it can not be changed. They stand between those whom the state is under obligation to uplift or to repress—the exceptional members of the body politic—and the state itself, the whole people, represented in the legislative and executive branches of the government, especially the legislature, with its power to ordain statutes and make appropriations. Their function is to ascertain the numbers, condition and needs of the helpless and the lawless; to formulate their rights, for they have rights; to advise the state as to its duties toward them, and the policy to be pursued, in order to render them less numerous and more manageable; to secure, if possible, the enactment of laws tending not simply to the alleviation of suffering and the repression of crime, but to their partial or ultimate extinction, in so far as the operation of the causes which aggravate social evils can be held in check by judicious legislation. They should, in all that they say or do, have a due regard to proportion and perspective, not sacrificing the future to the present, nor a larger to a smaller in-

terest, but seeing to it that the utmost possible is accomplished with the limited means which the liberality of the taxpayers is able and willing to place at the disposal of the agents entrusted with the responsible duty of administering relief in its varied forms—custody, maintenance, medical care, education, and restraint. Their work is essentially one of perpetual readjustment—of classification, apportionment, and distribution. It is universal in a double sense: upon one side it includes all the people, upon the other all who have claims upon the people (including even the deaf and blind). In other words, it includes all who give and all who receive. The duty of a State Board is to cast up the entire account, including every debit and every credit, to strike the balance, and, if the account is not squared, to call the attention of the public to its unsatisfactory condition.

The second element in the philanthropic ideal is liberty.

By liberty we mean the freedom of individuals and associations to contribute to the solution of the charitable problem in their own way. The state, in assuming certain burdens as its share of the general work to be done by the community, does not prohibit private charity, either secular or ecclesiastical, to any extent or in any form which, to the givers, appears to be necessary and useful. It has no desire or intention to dry up the springs of benevolence, or to limit the number of beneficiaries, or to prescribe conditions upon which giving to the distressed shall be permitted. The state can suppress public begging, in the exercise of its police power, but not unless it provides means of support for those who, if deprived of this resource, would be deprived of a livelihood, because of inability either to work or to secure employment. It can further protect the public against imposture in the name of charity, by compelling private institutions and associations to submit to inspection and to make sworn statements of their receipts and expenditures, as well as of the character and amount of their actual work. Whether it can do more than this is doubtful, and the exercise of the powers specified is

not always expedient. The state is also jealous of the rights of individuals with whom interference on the ground of an intention to confer a supposed benefit is proposed, as in the case of the separation of children from their parents, or the arbitrary prohibition of certain forms of child labor, and the like. But the general principle may safely be laid down, that where the parties (the giver and the receiver) are agreed, and no palpable injury to the public can be shown to be involved, and no deception is practised, the state rather welcomes than discourages any assistance in the care of the unfortunate which citizens, acting in their individual or associated capacity, choose to offer.

The third element is simplicity.

Very much trouble is avoided, when the line of demarcation between public and private charity is clearly drawn and not crossed. The simplest and best rule appears to be that which forbids the payment of any money from any public treasury for the custody, care, or maintenance of any defectives, dependents, or delinquents in any private institution or by any private corporation organized for that purpose. What the state does is best done when done by the state's own agents and appointees, who are directly subject to its orders and liable to instant discharge if those orders are disobeyed. Private institutions have no right to organize and go into business on the assumption that the state will support them, either by subsidies or by contracts, which are indirect subsidies. The state abrogates some portion of its dignity and evades some portion of its responsibility, whenever it fails to do all that its duty to the unfortunate and the erring demands; it can not divide it with any other party whatever. If private charity undertakes a benevolent work, such charity should likewise be complete; it should assume the entire burden which it pretends to carry. The effect of mixing the two methods is unfortunate in many ways: by the needless multiplication of institutions and the enlarged expenditure which it entails, by the conflict of authority to which it so

often leads, by the lack of adequate and suitable supervision in so many instances, and by the inducement thus held out to fraud in the reception and retention of persons as objects of charitable care, who have no valid claim to such care, and who are frequently injured rather than benefited by it. The evidence that this is so may not be of such a character as to warrant a public scandal, and if it were, the exposure of wrongs perpetrated under the cloak of charity is a thankless task, involving serious fighting, at some risk, with no personal honor to gain by victory; there is therefore too much reason to believe that more or less wrong in institutions thus subsidized escapes punishment altogether. Finally, as to this point, the combinations made upon the floors of the halls of legislation and in the greater seclusion of the committee room or the hotel lobby, by the representatives of these institutions, are greedy and shameless, if not corrupt.

The fourth element is humanity.

The word humanity does not fully express the thought that public charity, the gift of the entire people through their representatives in the legislature, a tax voted upon themselves for the benefit of the weaker members of the community, is the formal, official expression of the popular conviction that every civic corporation is in fact a brotherhood. Public charity, as we understand it, is impossible, where the brotherly feeling which underlies democratic institutions is lacking—the feeling that the taxpayers are not wronged, if that which is voted away of the people's money is the lawful due of those upon whom it is bestowed: a debt of love, under the higher law of the golden rule. The social problem with which the whole civilized world is now wrestling, in the hope to coax or compel a solution, is how to reconcile economic and ethical law—the claims of business and of humanity, the decalogue and the multiplication table. The public conscience is not sufficiently aroused and enlightened to settle the wage question in a manner to avoid the occasion and need for alms-giving in any form; but the millions expended annually, in

so-called charity, from the public revenues, are the best proof that the popular heart is a heart of love and tender sympathy. They prove that the sentiment of equality before God (which is robbed of a portion of its dignity when translated into the phrase equality before the law) and of solidarity of interest based upon racial unity, (which in a higher form of expression means common divine sonship), in other words, the idea of equality founded in brotherhood founded in sonship—a religious idea, the name of which is not humanity but love—has been inwrought into our political institutions; and herein we have the strongest possible guarantee of their perpetuity. A citizen can accept the loving gift of his brothers without humiliation; if given in the right spirit and accepted in the same, he is not pauperized thereby. He receives nothing that would not be bestowed with equal freedom upon any other citizen in his place; nothing that he would not be called upon to give, if he were in the more favored position and circumstances. This is the ideal of public charity. Every man who needs help has the right to expect it in the first instance from those nearest to him in blood, affection, or locality; but his ultimate appeal is to the whole human race, and the state ordains that this resource shall never fail him. Indeed, where it is certain that individuals can not or will not give what is really needed, or that if they do they will thereby impoverish or otherwise injure themselves or their families, the state anticipates the demand and provides help without waiting to be asked to do so. The government thus plants itself upon the principles of the Lord's prayer and the sermon on the mount. The State Boards embody and express this popular religious sense of humanitarian obligation; and it is their duty neither to betray it themselves nor to let it lapse into oblivion on the part of those whose business it is to give it practical effect.

The fifth element is intelligence.

Here we pass from the quasi religious to the quasi scientific aspect of charitable endeavor. Sound judgment rests primarily upon accurate information. The information re-

quired for the improvement of the methods adopted in charitable work, so as to secure a better result at less expense of time, money, and personal effort, is of two sorts, namely: knowledge, in the first place, of the local situation, and second, knowledge of the methods in use elsewhere, to meet similar conditions, and of their comparative value. It can not be acquired without labor. There is no excuse for ignorance of the number, condition and needs of the dependents and delinquents within the jurisdiction of any State Board. The least that it can do is to know what is done in the state to relieve distress and restrain disorder, whether by the state, the churches, or by voluntary associations, and how far the demand for relief and repression is met; it may be more than met, in some ways, and the power thus wasted lost for service in other directions. But the ability efficiently, economically, and equitably to administer the public charities of a state or of a municipality implies some degree of familiarity with the organization of charity in other towns, states, and countries. Such acquaintance is gained by reading, by travel, and by personal intercourse with those in charge of charitable and correctional institutions and associations. The first test of the thoroughness with which any State Board does its work is found in its library, its collection of documents, pamphlets and books, and their arrangement; the second in the record contained in its reports of visits to institutions outside of its own jurisdiction, the inspection of which is serviceable to teach what to avoid, as well as what to imitate; the third in the regularity and extent of the attendance of its members upon this and other similar assemblies of practical workers in the charitable and correctional field. But it is not enough to collect information; it is equally important to diffuse it—to impart it not merely to the governor and legislature, but to the general public, whose opinion controls these officials. A report on public charities should be sufficiently clear and complete in its statements, statistical and otherwise, to be intelligible to readers in other states and even in foreign lands;

and the records ought to possess a character of uniformity and continuity such as to prove that its author appreciates the fact that he is accumulating material for the future historian and really writing for posterity.

The sixth and last element which we shall name is that of integrity, not merely in the sense of common honesty, but in the etymological significance of the term—completeness and homogeneity. The duty of a State Board, with reference to the collection and expenditure of public funds, is to see that money is not taken from the taxpayers upon false pretences, nor in amounts larger than is really necessary to accomplish the purpose in view in making a specific appropriation; that it is properly accounted for, and not stolen, either directly or indirectly; and that it is not wasted, by the employment of useless supernumeraries, or the payment of extravagant salaries, or by extravagance and display in the buildings and appointments pertaining to a public institution. A thoroughly conscientious and upright Board of State Commissioners can not do otherwise than frown upon nepotism and political favoritism in the appointment of institution officials and employees. It regards incompetency as the worst form of waste—a wrong to the beneficiaries of institutions as well as to the public treasury, and an absolute bar to the execution of the popular will in their creation and maintenance; but there is some degree of incompetence wherever there is inexperience, hence it is opposed to political rotation in office in institutions, where the competency and integrity of the officials in charge is not questioned. It furthermore must be just in its appreciation of the relative claims of the various classes of the unfortunate, not favoring one institution at the expense of another, nor yielding to local pressure for large appropriations at one place and resisting it elsewhere. It stands for truth and righteousness in the administration of a sacred public trust. It looks upon the entire system of charities and correction as a unit, the balance between whose parts and functions must be preserved, at any cost; and it will not swerve,

to please anybody, however prominent or influential, from the line of inviolable duty.

This is the standard of efficiency by which a State Board must be judged. This is the spirit which it should seek to communicate to every member of the entire organization of which it is the official head, and to instil it into the public and legislative conscience. Its success or failure in this attempt is the measure of its utility. Without a high ideal, its practical usefulness is *nil*—or, worse than that, a minus quantity.

We have intimated, at the outset, that the ideal of the State Boards, who form the nucleus of this body, is also the ideal of the Conference. In concluding we beg to submit a few thoughts bearing specifically upon this point. That ideal may be summed up in a single word, disinterestedness. The Conference represents and embodies the altruistic, not the egoistic idea; and the suggestion of self-seeking in the action of any one of its component parts would be a jarring note in the harmony of its discussions. It can consistently take no position inconsistent, for instance, with the largest inclusion and mutual tolerance. It knows here no distinction of creeds, religious or political, of sects or of sex. It rejects no one on account of his preference for this or that form of charitable or correctional work. Every man and every woman who has the welfare of humanity at heart is free, upon this platform, to advocate any measure or express any conviction, whether in accord with the views of the majority or not, if it is germane to the question at issue. We are not sure that the institution of the rule requiring the payment of annual dues is not a restriction upon the membership which should be removed, on the double ground that it is inconsistent with the original basis of the Conference as the annual meeting of the State Boards, and that it creates a distinction among those in attendance which is not only unkind, but injurious. We are certain that the sectional meetings ought not to be made so prominent or exacting as to interfere with the general work of the Conference, or to act as a check upon the liberty of

any member. We think that the more simply we come together as a family, animated by a single spirit, that of love to each other and to mankind, and the less formal our organization, in the shape of a constitution and by-laws, the less friction there will be and the greater influence for good we shall exert upon the world. Our religion is the religion of humanity; we must exemplify it in our mutual relations and in our treatment of each other, trusting chiefly for our unity and wise direction to the illuminating power of that divine sentiment. Finally, with regard to the intelligence which we desire to characterize all our proceedings, our assembling in this city, whose atmosphere is that of intellectual culture, and in this hall dedicated to learning, is in itself a guaranty that we desire to benefit by the counsel of scholars, and that we do not fear their criticism. If an alliance can here be formed between the investigators of human need and pain because that need is not satisfied, and the teachers of the youth who are in later life to grapple with these problems in a still more complicated form, when the most of us will be in our graves, the advantages of such an alliance to both the parties to it are too palpable to need elucidation. It is in the hope of effecting it that we have sought and accepted the invitation so generously extended to us by the faculty of Yale University and the citizens of New Haven, and we trust that the event will vindicate the motives and the action of the Conference.

FREDERICK HOWARD WINES, *Ch'n.*
CLARENCE SNYDER,
JOHN R. ELDER,
GEORGE B. WATERHOUSE,
H. C. WHITTLESEY,
ANNE B. RICHARDSON,
M. A. HOUSEHOLDER,
STEPHEN SMITH, M. D.,
Committee.

NOTE.

Mr. H. M. Boies, of Pennsylvania, a member of the committee, is absent from the country, in the Orient; his name is for that reason omitted from the signers of the report.

The question of membership fees, incidentally touched upon in the report, is one of such importance, that it is fair to give, in connection with what has been said, the practical considerations on the other side, as stated by Mr. H. H. Hart, of Minnesota, in a private letter to the chairman:

"It has been to me a humiliation, that the National Conference of Charities and Correction should put itself in a mendicant attitude, and that we should go to the local committees of different cities and solicit a donation, not simply for the purpose of meeting the local expenses, but also to defray necessary and proper annual expenses, of the Conference, including the publication of the proceedings. In former years the expense of publishing was met largely by the subscriptions of the several State Boards. The receipts from this source alone in 1880 were \$1,180 and in 1887 they were \$1,113, which covered nearly two-thirds the cost of editing, printing, etc.; but in 1894 the receipts from this source were only \$420, while the cost of publication had advanced to nearly \$1,900. The surplus cash in the treasury in 1892 was \$2,471; but this surplus had been reduced in 1894 to \$939. The shrinkage was due, first, to the fact that the Conference had to meet all of its own expenses at Chicago; and, second, to the small amount of sales, as we had 500 copies of the Proceedings of 1893 left on hand and 489 copies of the Proceedings of 1892, against only 270 copies of 1891 and 198 copies of 1890. Only the Boards of Minnesota, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Wyoming ordered the Proceedings of 1893. For 1894, we have in addition an order from Wisconsin and one from New York; but we have no orders from Pennsylvania, Illinois, Kansas, Colorado, or South Dakota, and several State Boards ordered a smaller number of copies than formerly. It seems necessary that the revenues of the Conference should be recruited from some source, if we are to maintain the standard heretofore established for our publications. The membership fees brought in \$460 in 1893, and in 1894 I think about \$600. We have already received membership fees for 1895 amounting to \$332, and I anticipate that we shall receive at least \$500 more, which will make an important addition to our income.

"But, in my judgment, the membership fee serves a much more important purpose, in identifying with the Conference many who are unable to attend. My observation is that people usually take an interest in enterprises to which they contribute, and I have received numerous letters from persons who will not be present at New Haven, but who express a wish to be enrolled as members. The gratuitous distribution of the annual Proceedings puts this volume substantially on the

same basis as a public document, to be laid upon the shelf; but those who pay for it and receive it as members of an organization to which they belong are much more likely to be interested in it. Moreover, membership fees have been received from more than one hundred persons who otherwise would not see the Proceedings at all; they are all people actively engaged in public or private charitable work.

"The question is open to debate; but it will be necessary to provide some other source of revenue, in case the membership fee should be discarded. I do not think that the National Prison Association has been injured by the requirement of dues from its members; and I observe that the American Academy of Political and Social Science has an annual income of nearly \$10,000 from membership fees, which must mean a membership of nearly 2,000.

The financial support of the Conference is a subject which should, at the New Haven meeting, receive careful consideration and steps should be taken to put it upon a more certain and enduring basis than in past years.

F. H. W.

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